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ABSTRACT

Forensics judges rank students, determine the outcome of tournaments, and are in positions to give the contestants feedback that can help them learn. Several ideas that can help improve the quality of judging include: event rules should appear on the ballots, suggested criteria for judging should appear on the ballots, tournaments should use judging preference sheets, each contestant should receive an individual ballot with criticisms and suggestions, coaches should experiment with varied tournament formats that increase feedback to the student, speech departments at the university level should train students to be competent coaches and judges, workshops should be held to provide informal instruction to judges and coaches, and certification of judges should be encouraged. (TJ)

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INNOVATION IN INDIVIDUAL EVENTS: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF JUDGING

INDIANA SPEECH ASSOCIATION

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If someone asks you to describe your role in forensics, you'd probably respond that you're a coach--you recruit students, prepare them for tournaments, and take them to other schools to compete. Yet, you have another responsibility that is equally important. You are also a judge. The judge is an extremely crucial part of the tournament--you can't even have one without him. But it's not enough to have just a warm body with a ballot in its hand. The hand that holds the ballot should belong to a competent judge.

Your students are heard by many different judges during their forensics career. Those judges rank your students, determining the outcome of the tournament, and, they are in a position to give the contestants feedback which can help them learn. Since all judges have these two important responsibilities, they should also have a third thing in common--all judges should be well-qualified for their duties.

To improve the quality and effectiveness of judging, or to maintain it at an already high level, we offer the following

suggestions. These suggestions are not intended to exhaust all possible methods of assuring quality judging. Neither are they necessarily intended to be adopted in their entirety. We do hope though that you will find sufficient merit in these ideas to experiment with them in the near future or to expand the use of those that have already been tried.

1. Event rules should appear on the ballots. We should expect judges to be familiar with the rules of the events they are judging. Students should have prepared in compliance with these rules and ought to be judged accordingly. However, you have probably encountered the judge who doesn't know the time limits, or substantive requirements, or even the name of the event he is judging. A judge can easily forget a time limit. Some judges may not coach all events though they are expected to judge all events. And hired judges who don't coach may not be familiar with the rules of a particular tournament. In order to assure that all judges know the rules

of the events they are judging and to which the students ought to adhere, tournament directors should print the rules for an event on its ballot.

2. Suggested criteria for judging should appear on the ballots. In addition to the event rules, some schools are now including suggested criteria for judging each event on the ballots. For example, an extemp ballot might suggest that important criteria to keep in mind include organization, supporting material, delivery, and relevance to the question. These suggested criteria are important to three types of judges. There is the inexperienced judge who doesn't have a clear idea of the goals of the event or the criteria he should use in judging the event. There is the judge who feels comfortable judging some events but unsure of himself in others. The third type of judge is competent to judge the event but hasn't explicitly formulated the criteria by which he judges. The suggested criteria are helpful in reminding this judge of the important elements at the time he is making

his judging decision.

Yet, these criteria are only suggested to the judge. They are not the only criteria that he can use. These suggestions are not designed to turn judges into automatons. In fact, this is impossible because each judge will weight the criteria differently. We think that placing suggested criteria on the ballots can promote quality judging. In addition, this will help students and coaches in preparing for a tournament for they'll know the critiera that will likely be used to evaluate the student's performance.

3. Tournaments should use judging preference sheets. Ball State University has introduced a unique innovation--the judging preference sheet. Each judge is asked to complete a form indicating which events he prefers not to judge. Judges are used in the events they prefer, and, by implication, in the events they are probably most qualified to judge.

We know of several judges, including ourselves, who think that this is an excellent idea. Even though I have had course-

work in oral interpretation, I prefer to judge public address events. While I feel that I can make discriminating judgments and explain the rationale for these judgments in interp events, I have better background in public address. I can offer more suggestions in both substance and form of public address events. Furthermore, some judges simply don't enjoy judging certain events and, as a result may not be quite as attentive in those rounds as in rounds they enjoy listening to. We are not arguing here that judges are not competent to judge all events, but simply that we ought to try to use them in their strongest areas where they can make the best judgments and offer the best suggestions to contestants.

It would be difficult if not impossible to follow preferences completely in small tournaments or at tournaments where virtually all of the judges happen to ask not to judge the same event. However, the more the tournament director is able to use this method, the better the judging should be.

4. <u>Each contestant should receive an individual ballot with criticisms and suggestions.</u> Communication theorists have

recognized the fundamental importance of feedback to communication. Carncart stresses the value of criticism as a means of feedback in learning:

> It is well established in educational theory that learning cannot take place without criticism. A person who wishes to learn a new task or to improve upon his performance of an old one, will not progress without some criticism. If one does not know why he is failing to attain the results that he desires, he is not likely to improve.[1]

This places an important responsibility on those who are attempting to improve a student's speaking performance. Braden explains that "criticism is synonymous with teaching. The teacher has a solemn obligation to tell each student after each performance how he can improve."[2] The implication for judges should be clear: The judge must give individual critiques to contestants if the tournament's learning experience is to be maximized.

Not only is it desirable for the student to receive feedback from the judge; but, it is also important for the coach to obtain feedback about their students' performances.

If your contestants consistently get ranked in 4th and 5th place, you will want to be able to pinpoint the reasons the judges ranked them so low. And since some students are notorious for performing differently in practice than in competition, it is essential to have the judge's description of their performance in the round.

A third rationale for individual ballots is the simple fact that judges may be able to give a coach new ideas and perspectives that will help the student. A judge could suggest an alternative example or organizational pattern that the coach hasn't thought to suggest to the student. Feedback is crucial if the student is to improve--individual ballots provide the necessary feedback.

5. Coaches should experiment with varied tournament formats which increase feedback to the student. Recognizing the importance of feedback in the student's development, various tournaments have adopted alternative formats. One of these reduces the number of rounds allowing the judge to give oral critiques to each speaker. This format allows

the student to ask questions and facilitates the communication of judge's comments and criticisms. It reflects the fact that communication is not a one way process; rather, communication requires interaction between parties before understanding can occur.

Another format is the noncompetitive workshop. Each student enters a workshop for an event. A critic-judge will work with four or five students for the day. For example, a workshop for beginning extempers could include instruction and exercises in the rules of the event, basic components of the extemporaneous speech, filing materials, selecting a topic and a practice-critique session. The exercises and practice session provide immediate feedback to the student on the skills he has just learned. The workshop encourages students to ask questions and concentrate their efforts to improve on a particular weakness noted by the critic.

The judge's most important role is to provide feedback to the student so that he can improve his speaking abilities. Oral critiques and workshops attempt to increase

the amount of judge-student interaction to maximize learning. In addition, these alternative formats provide variety for all students and an excellent opportunity to get novices initiated.

6. Speech departments at the university level should train students to be competent coaches and judges. Unfortunately, one-fourth of the high school coaches that serve as judges have had no previous experience or special interest in the area of forensics.[3] Yet, we expect them to be expert judges, capable of making decisions and giving insightful suggestions will influence the education of our students.

We must train future coaches for the vital role they serve as a judge. Speech departments at the university level should provide instruction in evaluating student performances, including positive methods for evaluating and criteria for judging. Courses in forensics and required participation in the events for speech majors and minors would also provide substantive background for the judge.

7. Workshops should be held to provide informal in-

struction to judges and coaches. Formal coursework at the university level is not always possible for judges and coaches currently involved with a forensics program. Future coaches may not have had the optimum university background in forensics either. A potential alternative would be workshops conducted at speech conventions, tournaments, or universities. Workshops can provide training to improve coaching and judging skills.

However, these workshops need not be limited to those with little or no formal training. They can take the form of a roundtable or forum where the goals of events and means of achieving them are disucussed with profit even for the highly trained or experienced coach. Each coach may have unique ideas and techniques for coaching or judging which ought to be shared with the entire forensics community for the benefit of all our students.

8. Certification of judges should be encouraged. Another possible innovation which could improve the quality of judging is to certify judges. Central Michigan University has adopted

a program to certify judges in debate--their ideas could be adapted to certify judges in Individual Events. The Department of Speech at Central is frequently asked to provide judges for hire for leagues in their geographical area. Anyone can offer his services to judge in those leagues and any league is free to hire any judge they wish. However, Central will only recommend judges which have been certified. Apparently leagues are satisfied with the quality of judges provided by the certification program, for many leagues rely on these judges.

Central's certification process consists of three steps. Prospective judges take a test over debate theory. This test was constructed from data gathered by a survey of coaches which asked what concepts they thought a qualified judge should know. Examples of questions are the following three True-False items from recent tests:

1. No new evidence may be presented in rebuttals.
2. The affirmative may reverse speaking order in the rebuttals but the negative may not.
3. An affirmative case of dubious worth is still prima facie until the negative presents evidence to the contrary.

In the second step, they listen to a discussion of the current debate proposition conducted by coaches who worked at Central Michigan University's summer high school workshop. Finally, they watch a video-tape of a debate from that workshop on the current topic and write a ballot for that debate. The three members of the certification staff later read the ballots, and only if two or more staff members reject a judge's ballot is certification denied in this step. They do not examine the ballots to see if he made the "right" decision, only if he gave a clear explanation of the reasons for his decision. They also check to see if individual comments were both positive and constructive, but not discouraging (They are not impressed with comments like "You really ought to try band, kid.") They are not trying to turn out identical judging machines, but only to assure that judges have at least a minimal knowledge of important aspects of debate theory, a minimal knowledge of the current debate topic, and a minimal level of skill in writing a ballot.

It would certainly be possible to set up a certification

program for Individual Events. First, a survey should be undertaken to determine what knowledge coaches think a judge should have in each event. This would then be used to construct a test of basic knowledge in the theory of Individual Events. But since most events don't have a common topic area, there wouldn't be a topic analysis analogous to the second stage in the debate certification. However, there could be a topic analysis for discussion and an analysis of current events for extemp and impromptu. Third, there ought to be a step in which judges watch video-tapes of speeches and write ballots. These could be examined to see that their comments were easily understandable, both positive and constructive, but were not discouraging.

Of course, it is not necessary to follow this particular method; although it does seem reasonable, others could be substituted. Certification need not be limited to hired judges: it could also include coaches. However, any certifica-

tion program should be sure to include seminars and training, both before certification and after it for those who need to retake it. Certification should be a means of assuring that all judges are competent--not a means of prohibiting certain judges from judging. It should not try to prescribe how we should judge, but to assure that we have at least the minimum knowledge necessary to judge the event and sufficient skill in writing a ballot.

Some of our suggestions have been tried successfully; others remain to be tried. We urge further experimentation with all of these ideas, singly and in combination. Hopefully they can improve the quality and effectiveness of judging at the tournaments our students attend. We should never lose sight of the fact that tournaments are a means to an end and not ends in themselves. They provide the means to improve a student's speaking ability--maximizing the learning experience with qualified judges.

Tournaments should not be considered just a winning experience, but a learning experience. The trophies that

students win will gather dust the next year and be forgotten soon after that, but the skills that they can learn from their judges can serve them for the rest of their lives.

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